



HEALTHY CONNECTIONS is published monthly by The William W. Backus Hospital as a community service to residents of eastern Connecticut. Information in Healthy Connections comes from a wide range of medical resources. Copyright © 2005 Backus Corporation  
Keith Fontaine, Vice President/Corporate Communications Shawn Mawhiney, Director of Communications

# Agencies collaborate to improve dental health

The dental health of children nationwide has improved in the past decade, but tooth decay continues to increase among the youngest and poorest children, according to a new report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Overall, tooth decay is the single most common chronic disease in the United States, according to Oral Health America, and the long-term effects of poor dental hygiene can be severe.

In southeastern Connecticut, there is an ongoing effort to reverse this disturbing trend. It's called Smiles Across Southeastern Connecticut, a partnership involving several local healthcare agencies, with a mission that includes oral health care access for children.

Last year, Backus Foundation, Inc., donated funding to United Community & Family Services (UCFS), one of the partners in the Smiles program, to allow the agency to provide badly needed dental and mental health



services to Norwich school children and TVCCA daycare facilities.

Chuck Seeman, President and CEO of UCFS, said the money is being used over a four-year period to expand dental services at Norwich Schools, including Norwich Free Academy, the Integrated Day Charter School, Teachers Memorial and Kelly Middle Schools, as well as TVCCA daycare centers. He added

that a recent Rotary District 7980 grant, along with funds from the Norwich Rotary and Sunrise Rotary clubs, has allowed the purchase of portable X-Ray machines for the schools.

"Access to dental services is extremely limited for a significant portion of our population," Mr. Seeman said. "That's why bringing the services to them is so important."

Meanwhile, Smiles and its partners have Connecticut Health Foundation funds in place to bring dental services to dozens of other schools in southeastern Connecticut.

"Without the Connecticut Health Foundation and the Backus Foundation, serving these towns would not be possible," said Sue Peters, Project Director of Smiles. "This is an incredible program, and it's making a big difference in these children's lives."

Studies show that when children are unable to access dental services, they tend to develop long-term health problems. For example, untreated dental problems can impair a child's ability to concentrate, Seeman said.

"It's the most preventable condition that there is, and it's the easiest to treat," he said. ■